

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Romell Holmes,) C/A No. 0:17-1257-HMH-PJG
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Plaintiff,) Plaintiff,)
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)
v.) v.)
)
Barnwell County Detention Center,) REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
)
)
Defendant.) Defendant.)
)

The plaintiff, Romell Holmes, a self-represented state pretrial detainee, brings this civil rights action pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Plaintiff files this action *in forma pauperis* under 28 U.S.C. § 1915; § 1915A. This matter is before the court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2)(D.S.C.). Having reviewed the Complaint in accordance with applicable law, the court concludes that it should be summarily dismissed with prejudice and without issuance and service of process.

I. Procedural Background

Plaintiff, an inmate at the Barnwell County Detention Center, alleges that on January 2, 2017 he was denied medical treatment after he slipped on a floor that was wet from a leaky roof. He claims the fall caused him injury to his lower back. He seeks damages for a violation of the Eighth Amendment's proscription against cruel and unusual punishment.

II. Discussion

A. Standard of Review

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of the *pro se* Complaint pursuant to the procedural provisions of the Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA"), Pub. L. No. 104-134, 110 Stat. 1321 (1996), including 28 U.S.C. § 1915 and 28 U.S.C.

§ 1915A. The Complaint has been filed pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915, which permits an indigent litigant to commence an action in federal court without prepaying the administrative costs of proceeding with the lawsuit, and is also governed by 28 U.S.C. § 1915A, which requires the court to review a complaint filed by a prisoner that seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity. See McLean v. United States, 566 F.3d 391 (4th Cir. 2009). Section 1915A requires, and § 1915 allows, a district court to dismiss the case upon a finding that the action is frivolous, malicious, fails to state a claim on which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief against a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b). In order to state a claim upon which relief can be granted, the plaintiff must do more than make mere conclusory statements. See Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009); Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007). Rather, the complaint must contain sufficient factual matter, accepted as true, to state a claim that is plausible on its face. Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 678; Twombly, 550 U.S. at 570. The reviewing court need only accept as true the complaint's factual allegations, not its legal conclusions. Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 678; Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555.

This court is required to liberally construe *pro se* complaints, which are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys. Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007); King v. Rubenstein, 825 F.3d 206, 214 (4th Cir. 2016). Nonetheless, the requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim cognizable in a federal district court. See Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs., 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990); see also Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 684 (2009) (outlining pleading requirements under Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure for "all civil actions").

B. Analysis

A legal action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 allows “a party who has been deprived of a federal right under the color of state law to seek relief.” City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes at Monterey, Ltd., 526 U.S. 687, 707 (1999). To state a claim under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege: (1) that a right secured by the Constitution or laws of the United States was violated, and (2) that the alleged violation was committed by a person acting under the color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988). In this action, Plaintiff alleges the defendant violated the Eighth Amendment’s proscription on cruel and unusual punishment by refusing to provide him medical treatment.¹

However, because Plaintiff has not identified a defendant that is amenable to suit, the court finds that Plaintiff’s Complaint should be dismissed for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. The only defendant named in the Complaint is “Barnwell County Detention Center,” but a detention center is not a “person” amenable to suit under § 1983 because it is an inanimate facility and not a person. It is well-settled that only “persons” may act under color of state law; therefore, a defendant in a § 1983 action must qualify as a “person.” See 42 U.S.C. § 1983; Monell v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs., 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978) (noting that for purposes of § 1983 a “person” includes individuals and “bodies politic and corporate”). Courts have held that inanimate objects such as buildings, facilities, and grounds are not “persons” and do not act under color of state law. See Nelson v. Lexington Cty. Det. Ctr., C/A No. 8:10-2988-JMC, 2011 WL 2066551, at *1 (D.S.C. May 26, 2011) (finding that the plaintiff failed to establish that the Lexington County Detention

¹ Claims of pretrial detainees against detention center officials for deliberate indifference to health and safety are evaluated under the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment rather than under the Eighth Amendment’s proscription against cruel and unusual punishment. See Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520, 535 & n.16 (1979); Martin v. Gentile, 849 F.2d 863, 870 (4th Cir. 1988). The court also notes that in light of its duty to liberally construe *pro se* complaints, Plaintiff appears to also raise a claim of deliberate indifference to his conditions of confinement.

Center, “as a building and not a person, is amenable to suit under § 1983”); see also Brooks v. Pembroke City Jail, 722 F. Supp. 1294, 1301 (E.D.N.C. 1989) (“Claims under § 1983 are directed at ‘persons’ and the jail is not a person amenable to suit.”). Because the Barnwell County Detention Center is not a “person” amenable to suit under § 1983, the court finds Plaintiff’s Complaint should be dismissed with prejudice for failure to state a claim upon which relief can be granted. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b)(1).²

III. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, it is recommended that the Complaint be dismissed with prejudice and without issuance and service of process.

June 13, 2017
Columbia, South Carolina


Paige J. Gossett
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE

*The parties are directed to note the important information in the attached
“Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation.”*

² The court recommends Plaintiff’s Complaint be dismissed with prejudice because the only defendant named is not amenable to suit. See McLean v. United States, 566 F.3d 391, 400-01 (4th Cir. 2009) (“While a potentially meritorious claim, particularly by a pro se litigant, should not be unqualifiedly dismissed for failure to state a claim unless its deficiencies are truly incurable, such an unqualified dismissal is entirely proper when the court has reviewed the claim and found it to be substantively meritless.”) (internal citations omitted). However, the court notes that Rule 15 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure allows for amendments to pleadings where the original pleading is defective. See Galustian v. Peter, 591 F.3d 724, 730 (4th Cir. 2010) (holding a plaintiff may amend his pleading to add a party without the leave of court where the plaintiff has not yet amended as a matter of right, and the defendant has not filed a responsive pleading, subject to the other limitations of Rule 15(a)).

Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’” Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co., 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note).

Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); see Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Robin L. Blume, Clerk
United States District Court
901 Richland Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Thomas v. Arn, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); Wright v. Collins, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); United States v. Schronce, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984).